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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3545

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9647

RUEHAA/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 1327

RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 3820

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0968

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1704

RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 6384

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7274

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9530

RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2016

RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 3146

RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 0391

RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 8537

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TAGS: PK PREL PTER IZ

SUBJECT: PAKISTANI CONCERNS OVER SPECULATION ON U.S.  
WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) During an October 20 meeting with the Ambassador on Indo-Pak relations, National Security Advisor Tariq Aziz shifted the conversation to ask about press reports that President Bush had likened the current situation in Iraq to the U.S. experience in Vietnam. (Note: Aziz's question was a reference to garbled reporting of the President's remarks during an ABC News interview when asked to comment on a Tom Friedman piece comparing Iraq to the 1968 Tet Offensive. End note.) These reports have been interpreted in the local press as a signal that USG policy has reached a tipping point with regard to the future of the U.S. deployment in Iraq. Aziz was stark in his commentary, stating plainly that if the U.S. walks away from the fight in Iraq, moderate Muslim leaders such as President Musharraf may not survive. "They day after you leave, the extremists will come for our heads," Aziz said. For the sake of its moderate friends and allies, Aziz pleaded, the U.S. must stay the course in Iraq. The Ambassador answered Aziz that while tactics may change to fit the circumstances, our commitment to Iraq remains firm.

¶2. (U) A day later, during the October 22 launch of the Urdu-edition of his auto-biography, President Musharraf rejected the proposal of British General Robert Dannert that the UK should withdraw its forces from Iraq, saying that "withdrawal of troops by the U.S. and its allies right now would have far-reaching impact not only on the region, but also on the whole world." Musharraf went on to say that the British general should have examined the pros and cons of a troop withdrawal at this juncture before offering his policy prescription, concluding by saying that he "totally disagreed" with the proposal.

¶3. (S) Comment: Aziz's worried aside to the Ambassador and Musharraf's forthright criticism of General Dannert's proposal to quit the field illustrate our Pakistani GWOT partners' deep concern over the prospect of a premature U.S.

withdrawal from Iraq. As political leaders who face considerable domestic risks implementing tough policy decisions to advance our joint counter-terrorism agenda, uncoordinated talk of withdrawal timetables or references to the American pull-out from Vietnam must send chills down the spine of Musharraf and other moderate Muslims leaders in the region. Our work will be considerably more difficult if Musharraf and the GOP leadership begin to factor the probability of an early force withdrawal in Iraq into their calculus balancing cooperation with the U.S. with Pakistan's darker domestic political realities. End comment.

CROCKER